

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0781

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 7070

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, LA

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS IN REFUGEE RETURN

SUMMARY. IN SEVERAL RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUMI VONGVICHIT AND OTHER SENIOR PGNU OFFICIALS, WE HAVE GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT THE QUESTION OF THE RETURN OF REFUGEES TO THEIR NATIVE VILLAGES WILL SOON BE ON THE AGENDA OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE TO IMPLEMENT THE ACCORDS (JCCIA).

1. ALTHOUGH THE PATHET LAO HAVE INSISTED SINCE THE FORMATION OF THE PGNU THAT THE JCCIA SHOULD ADDRESS VARIOUS PROBLEMS ONE AFTER THE OTHER COMMENCING WITH THE NEUTRALIZATION OF THE TWO CAPITALS, A DECISION HAS APPARENTLY BEEN TAKEN TO HASTEN THE PROCESS AND ON SEPTEMBER 5 THE JCCIA DISCUSSED THE PRISONER RELEASE WHICH IS NOW SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 19 ALTHOUGH DELINEATION OF THE "HOT POINTS" BETWEEN THE TWO ZONES WAS FAR FROM ACCOMPLISHED.

2. IN THE AMBASSADOR'S TALK WITH PHOUMI VONGVICHIT ON SEPTEMBER 6, PHOUMI STATED THAT THE NEXT TOPIC TO BE DISCUSSED IN THE JCCIA WOULD BE THE RETURN OF THE
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BODIES BURIED BY EITHER SIDE DURING THE WAR FOLLOWING

WHICH THE RETURN OF REFUGEES WOULD BE URGENTLY ADDRESSED. IN THIS AND IN VARIOUS OTHER OFFICIAL AND SOCIAL CONVERSATIONS, WE HAVE GAINED THE FOLLOWING APPRECIATION OF PHOUMI'S VIEWS.

A. HE RECOGNIZES THAT NO INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY SHOULD BE COMPELLED TO MOVE AGAINST ITS WILL.

B. PHOUMI BELIEVES THAT EXTENSIVE PREPARATIONS SHOULD BE MADE FOR THE REFUGEES WHO WILL BE RETURNING TO THE PATHET LAO ZONE.

C. HE TALKS OF HOUSES BEING BUILT FOR THEM, IRRIGATION DAMS REPAIRED, PADDY DIKES PUT IN GOOD ORDER, AND SCHOOLS AND OTHER GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS BEING CONSTRUCTED.

D. HE ALSO BELIEVES THAT EACH FAMILY SHOULD BE SUPPORTED FOR ABOUT A YEAR AND SHOULD BE GIVEN SEED, A BUFFALO, A PLOW, ETC. IN ORDER TO PERMIT THEM TO BE SELF SUFFICIENT AFTER THE FIRST HARVEST. THIS GENERAL AND RATHER GRANDIOSE OUTLOOK APPEARS TO BE SHARED BY THE PATHET LAO LEADERS WITH WHOM WE HAVE DISCUSSED THIS SUBJECT.

3. AID DIRECTOR MANN DISCUSSED THE REFUGEE PROBLEM WITH ECONOMIC MINISTER SOTH PHETRASY ON 9 SEPTEMBER AT WHICH TIME SOTH CONFIRMED THAT THE REFUGEE PROBLEM WOULD VERY SHORTLY BE ADDRESSED BY THE JCCIA. MR. MANN DREW ATTENTION TO THE VERY LARGE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES WHO MIGHT BE INVOLVED, PARTICULARLY IN MR II. HE MENTIONED THE FACT THAT AIR SUPPORT OF A MAJOR MOVE WOULD BE COSTLY AND DIFFICULT, AND SUGGESTED THAT THE EAST-WEST ROAD ACROSS THE PRESENT REFUGEE ENCLAVE BE EXTENDED TO LINK UP WITH ROUTE 4 AT THA VIENG. SOTH AGREED THAT OVERLAND MOVEMENT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE NECESSARY AND WE WILL PURSUE THIS MATTER FURTHER.

4. UNTIL NOW, WE HAD BEEN ASSUMING THAT THE REFUGEES
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WOULD REMAIN WHERE THEY WERE THROUGH THE HARVEST SEASON IN THE AUTUMN OF 1975. NOW, HOWEVER, IN VIEW OF THE PL'S APPARENT PREDISPOSITION TO MOVE ON THIS ISSUE MORE QUICKLY THAN WE HAD EXPECTED, THERE MAY WELL BE SOME MOVEMENT OF REFUGEES PRIOR TO THE PLANTING SEASON FEB/MAY 1975.

5. IN OUR VIEW, THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL INTEREST

IN HUMANITARIAN RELIEF TO LAOS MAKES AN EARLY MOVE DESIREABLE. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT ASSISTANCE FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES, AS WELL AS FROM THE UNITED NATIONS, MIGHT BE FORTHCOMING IN THE RELATIVELY NEAR FUTURE IF THE LAO HAVE CONCRETE PROPOSALS TO MAKE AND HAVE PROJECTS WHICH CAN BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF POTENTIAL DONORS. ALTHOUGH THE PATHET LAO REMAIN EXTREMELY SUSPICIOUS OF U.S. ACTIVITIES IN THIS AREA, WE ARE GAINING IMPRESSION THAT THEY MAY OVERCOME THIS PARANOIA AND BE WILLING TO HAVE THE U.S. PLAY AS YET AN UNDEFINED ROLE IN CONNECTION WITH REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT.

6. THE LIKELIHOOD OF SOME REFUGEES RETURNING TO THE PATHET LAO ZONE WILL DOUBTLESS RAISE QUESTIONS PARTICULARLY ON THE VIENTIANE SIDE WHERE VARIOUS LEADERS CAN BE EXPECTED TO DEPLORE THE DEPARTURE OF POTENTIAL VOTERS AND THE LOSS OF CONTROL OVER A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES. IN OUR VIEW, US POLICY SHOULD STEADFASTLY (1) SUPPORT FREE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE; THAT IS, REFUGEES WISHING TO RETURN TO PL ZONE SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO DO SO AS SHOULD THOSE WHO WISH TO COME TO VIENTIANE SIDE, AND (2) WE SHOULD BE PREPARED TO OFFER ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES AS PGNU MAY REQUEST.
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